

Murphy named director of state parks system

Mike Murphy, a businessman, educator and past president of the Friends of the N.C. Museum of Natural Sciences, has been appointed director of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. He succeeds Lewis Ledford, who retired in January from a 37-year career with the state parks system.

As director, Murphy will oversee the state's 35 state parks, four state recreation areas, 20 state natural areas and other managed units totaling nearly 220,000 acres of land and water.

"Mike brings to us passion, experience and a terrific skill set," John Skvarla, secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, said. "He is ideally suited to lead the division as we approach the North Carolina state parks system's centennial celebration in 2016."



Murphy, 60, is a past managing director and president of Trident Financial Services, and most recently served as an astronomy and physics instructor at Ravenscroft School in Raleigh. He earned a bachelor's degree in environmental science from the University of Virginia, a Master of Business Administration from UNC-Chapel Hill and served six years in the U.S. Navy.

Highest protection sought for new state parks land

Legislation pending before the North Carolina General Assembly this summer will grant ultimate protection to 17,000 acres added to the state parks system in recent years by incorporating those lands into the State Nature and Historic Preserve established by the state constitution.

The proposal that originated from the office of Secretary John Skvarla of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resource was drafted into legislation by the Environmental Review Commission in April and endorsed by the Council of State at a May 6 meeting.

The land has been acquired since 2009 for 23 units of the state parks system, with principal funding from the state's conservation trust funds. The 91 tracts have an appraised value of \$94.4 million and include 3,394 acres at Grandfather Mountain State Park, 1,823 acres at Chimney Rock State Park, 2,916 acres at Carvers Creek State Park and 2,818 acres at Yellow Mountain State Natural Area.

"This action reflects the growth of the state parks system and will ensure the protection of the land in perpetuity," Secretary Skvarla said. "Lands designated to the State Nature and Historic Preserve are among the most cherished in North Carolina, and the state parks system is proud of its record of stewardship of these natural resources."

Seven state park rangers commissioned

Seven new North Carolina state park rangers received commissions as law enforcement officers May 29. The rangers were sworn in by Superior Court Judge Douglas B. Sasser at a special ceremony at Umstead State Park.

Receiving a commission as a Special Peace Officer at the end of 17-week basic law enforcement training is generally regarded as the last formal step before a ranger takes on full duties in a unit of the

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state parks system. During the training period prior to commissioning, a ranger is assimilated into the park and begins assuming duties in resource management and visitor service.

Beyond law enforcement skills, all are trained in medical first response, search-and-rescue, wildfire suppression, natural resource management, interpretive skills and environmental education.

The rangers who received commissions are: Joshua Aaron Banks at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area; Andrew James Boos at Falls Lake State Recreation Area; Mary Catherine Griffin at Hanging Rock State Park; Autumn Marie Kahl at Cliffs of the Neuse State Park; Aaron Allan Ledford at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area; Joshua Lee McIntyre at Jordan Lake State Recreation Area; James Thomas Rusher Jr. at Falls Lake State Recreation Area.

State parks observe National Trails Day

National Trails Day June 7 in North Carolina's state parks was seasoned by the introduction of several new and innovative trails.

At Lake James State Park, more than 50 mountain bikers came to inaugurate 15 miles of newly built biking trails at the park's Paddy's Creek Access. The project, including a new parking area, represents an investment of \$210,000 from the N.C. Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.

A new TRACK Trail designed to get kids outdoors was dedicated at Grandfather Mountain State Park on the eve of Trails Day. Pilot Mountain and William B. Umstead state parks celebrated new trail segments that help connect those parks with other trail assets in their communities. A "volks-march" along a new section of Raleigh Greenway opened a connection between that network and Umstead. The Friends of Sauratown Mountain were largely responsible for a newly relocated and rehabbed trail along Horne Creek and the Yadkin River at Pilot Mountain.

In all, the state parks system held more than two dozen events for the day. Volunteers appeared at a number of parks to improve existing trails and build new ones, including Elk Knob, Crowders Mountain and Lake Norman.



North Carolina Trails Workshop held

The first North Carolina Trails Workshop June 4-5 brought trail advocates, planners and recreation professionals together in Raleigh to discuss the nuts and bolts of "Connecting Communities" with trails. Under that theme, experts were asked to brainstorm and share ideas on how to leverage often-limited resources to get more trail miles in place.

Opening the two-day event, Carol Tingley, acting state parks director, quoted western author Louis L'Amour, "The trail is the thing, not the end of the trail." That seems evident in the fact that using trails (for hiking, biking and paddling) is the favorite activity listed in every survey of outdoor recreation. Discussing trails leads naturally to collaboration and cooperation, Tingley said.

A portion of the two-day workshop was attended by legislators and by Brad Ives, assistant secretary of the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Ives told the group that North Carolina is committed to continuing trail grant programs to the extent possible, in part because dynamic trails as part of a broad outdoor recreation scene are a factor in a region's economic health.

The event was staged by NCSU's Recreation Resources Service and the trails program of the state parks system, which works with local governments in trail planning efforts, administers grant programs and guides development of the Mountains-to-Sea State Trail. Workshop panel sessions explored topics such as GIS data, preserving a sense of place and connecting communities with multi-use trails.

The Steward is an e-newsletter of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation. To learn how to subscribe to the complete version and have news of the North Carolina state parks sent directly to your email inbox, scan the QR code here with a smartphone app or visit www.ncparks.gov, and click "News."

